

Schelling on Individuation

Daniel Whistler

1. From *Naturphilosophie* to *Identitätssystem*

In May 1801, as Schelling later reported in a letter to Eschenmayer, “the light burst upon me in philosophy” (1962 3:222), an illumination that gave rise to the programmatic *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* and the various attempts at formulating the *Identitätssystem* that were to follow. It was an illumination, moreover, that occurred only four months after Schelling had published the culminating statement of his early *Naturphilosophie*, *Über den wahren Begriff der Naturphilosophie*. Between January and May 1801 – between issues one and two of the second volume of the *Zeitschrift für speculative Physik* – Schelling’s philosophical vision apparently underwent a revelation, made visible as the transition from *Naturphilosophie* to *Identitätssystem*.

Nevertheless, it is a foolish gesture to neatly differentiate a period of pure *naturphilosophische* research running from 1797 to January 1801 from a period of systematic construction grounded in the concept of identity that began in May 1801 and continued to at least 1805.¹ For one thing, as Grant (2006 3-6) has rightly insisted, Schelling never abandons his *naturphilosophische* research: some of his most important publications in this area occur after 1801, and there are few works written between 1801 and 1805 that do not substantially engage in *Naturphilosophie*.² Moreover, it is fairly easy to discern continuities between the concerns, concepts and

¹ On dating the *Identitätssystem*, see Whistler 2013 58-60.

² Schelling himself later laments the periodization of his work of this period into an “*Identitätssystem*” (1856 10:107; 1994b 120).

occasionally discursive strategies of the *naturphilosophische* texts of the late 1790s and those of the *Identitätssystem*. Thus, Beiser (2002 557), to take one example, reads the *Identitätssystem* as merely a further working out of the positions articulated in the *Allgemeine Deduktion* and *Über den wahren Begriff*, thereby contributing to the increasingly-popular case for a fundamental continuity to Schelling's output as a whole.³

And yet, between January and May 1801 something does change. While this change may not often be substantial, there is at the very least an alteration in Schelling's method and vocabulary. To put it bluntly, the *Identitätssystem* talks, for the most part, in the kind of classic metaphysical language that was purposefully avoided in the *Naturphilosophie*. From May 1801 onwards, Schelling reverts to traditional metaphysical terminology, inquiring into the relation of form and essence, the nature of time, causality and knowledge, the origins of error and illusion. Solutions to the above were indeed implicit in the *Naturphilosophie*, but framed in terms of more esoteric issues usually eschewed by post-Kantian philosophy (the relation between light and gravity or magnetism and combustion). The *Identitätssystem* therefore returns to more conventional philosophical terrain and speaks in a more recognisable philosophical voice. It is for these sorts of reasons that Lukács (1980) notoriously identifies the beginnings of nineteenth-century restoration philosophy in Schelling's development after 1800.

What follows is a case study in mapping this shift from *Naturphilosophie* to *Identitätssystem*. I trace Schelling's discussions of individuation from 1799 to 1806 not just as a means of understanding the nature of the above transition, but crucially as a way of evaluating what was lost and what gained by it. Lukács may be the most

³ For the classic statement of this "continuity thesis", see Grant 2006 3-5.

explicit, but he is certainly not alone in considering the *Identitätssystem* an aberration, failed experiment or plain mistake. It has been the least sympathetically treated of any phase of Schelling's career: its austere monism and endlessly proliferating constructions of potencies have put off many a commentator.⁴ The question then needs to be asked: why did Schelling feel compelled to erect this seemingly reactionary monstrosity? What did he hope to gain from the transition from a radical *Naturphilosophie* to the traditional metaphysical concerns of the *Identitätssystem*? My intention is to use the case study of individuation to provide some answers to these questions, thereby illuminating the value of that “light that burst upon” Schelling in 1801. Moreover, in so doing – and this is the third objective of the paper – the radical difference between Schelling and the mainstream of German philosophy from Jacobi to Hegel will also become clearer. The theme of individuation provides a salubrious exercise in exposing “the differend” (Toscano 2004 124) separating Schelling from the orthodoxies of German Idealism.

2. Individuation in the *Erster Entwurf*

To state that the 1799 *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* incessantly struggles with the problem of individuation is no exaggeration. Not only is individuation identified therein both as “the highest problem of the philosophy of nature” (1856 3:102; 2004 77) and its “chief problem” (18; 17), the text continually fails to offer satisfactory answers, such that Schelling ends up concluding, nature “is

⁴ In the English-language scholarship, White (1983 93-101) and Bowie (1993 87-90) are exemplary.

not really concerned with the individual – it is rather occupied with the annihilation of the individual.” (50; 40)⁵

Naturphilosophie in the *Erster Entwurf* is characterised as a science of becoming, a reconstruction of the stages in the infinite, incessant movement of productivity or nature. This unconditional force of productivity – nature as properly conceived – underlies being without itself ever fully coming to be or be perceived in the phenomenal realm. Hence, the first principle of *Naturphilosophie* begins, “The unconditioned cannot be sought in any individual ‘thing’ nor in anything of which one can say that it ‘is’ For what ‘is’ only partakes of being, and is only an individual form or kind of being.” (11; 13) The problem of individuation that haunts the *Erster Entwurf* emerges as a direct result of this principle. That is, it generates two theses which must both be equally affirmed:

1. Finite individuals in nature must be expressions of the productive force (hence, “products” of it), since there is nothing else that can produce them.
2. Finite individuals in nature must fail to express this productive force, since the force itself – as unconditional and infinite – can never manifest itself entirely in a conditioned individual.

The problem of affirming both (1) and (2) simultaneously is, in Schelling’s own words, this: productivity “does not exhibit itself entirely in any finite product, and [yet] every individual is, as it were, a particular expression of it.” (11; 13)

⁵ To be clear, my claim in what follows is not that the *Erster Entwurf* is distinct from Schelling’s other *naturphilosophische* texts in its struggle with the problem of individuation, but rather that it provides a particularly illuminating articulation of this struggle.

Schelling here struggles with a synecdochical metaphysics: productivity both is its products and is more than them; nature both is and is not the entities of the natural world.⁶ It is little wonder, then, that it is here Nassar (2011) identifies the moment when Schelling stands closest to the Jena Romantics: the metaphysics of the *Erster Entwurf* perform the figures of irony and allegory, as finite natural products express the unconditioned in their very failure to express it. Schelling himself articulates this in terms of limitation and retardation: “If *being itself* is only *activity*, then the individual being can only be viewed as a determinate form or limitation of the originary activity.” (1856 3:12; 2004 14) In other words, the problem is how to slow productivity down so that it remains temporarily stationary, as static product rather than dynamic force. And this is merely to restate the above problem: products – when conceived from the viewpoint of “the unconditioned in nature” – are never entirely products, but merely temporary, partial retardations of the unconditioned that can never be permanent or complete on pain of negating the very productivity of the unconditioned. Schelling writes,

If being itself is = to activity, then the individual being cannot be an absolute *negation* of activity... However, viewed from a higher standpoint, this being itself is nothing other than a *continually operative natural activity* that is extinguished in its product. (13; 14)

However, of course, nature is never to be extinguished. In short, the unconditioned can never become conditioned without annulling its unconditioned nature (and since productivity is all there is, it cannot be so annulled).⁷ Thus Schelling writes, “Every

⁶ On synecdoche in German Idealist metaphysics, see Whistler 2013 25-6, 161-2.

⁷ See further Grant 2006 145-9.

activity perishes in its product... [Hence] we do not know *nature as product*.” (13; 14) From a *naturphilosophische* perspective, individual natural products cannot be fully accounted for; they cannot be known. Indeed, for the *Naturphilosoph*, “Originally, no *individual being* at all is present for us in Nature” (13; 14), or again,

Nature *exists* nowhere as product; all individual productions in Nature are merely apparent products, not the absolute product that always *becomes* and never *is*, and in which the absolute activity exhausts itself. (16; 16)

Noteworthy in the above is how the problem of individuation begins to be recast as a problem of conceiving “the absolute product”. Hence, the second principle of *Naturphilosophie* states, “Absolute activity cannot be exhibited by a finite product, but only by an *infinite* one.” (14; 15) In order to make sense of them from the perspective of the unconditioned, products must express the unconditioned entirely: individuals must themselves become infinite or absolute. The problem of individuation therefore becomes one of accounting for that which is simultaneously conditioned and unconditioned – that which affirms, rather than negates, unconditional productivity within the bounds of limitation. This sets a new agenda that will come to dominate Schelling’s thinking on individuation over the coming decade: the “possibility of the exhibition of the infinite in the finite” (14; 15). If *Naturphilosophie* necessarily fails to make sense of individuality as a retardation or negation of the unconditioned, can it nonetheless comprehend the individual on the model of affirmation? It is, I will contend, precisely this question that Schelling answers affirmatively within the *Identitätssystem*.

However, before considering in more detail Schelling’s alternative model of affirmation developed from 1801 onwards, I want to first place the *Erster Entwurf*’s

failure to account for individual natural products in the context of German Idealism as a whole. As we shall see, Schelling's failure here is an implicit repetition of a Jacobian orthodoxy on individuation that dominated German philosophy at the turn of the nineteenth century – and, to that extent, in 1799 Schelling still remains trapped within a conventional form of German Idealist metaphysics. Only when he explicitly confronts it in the *Identitätssystem*, does Schelling finally liberate his philosophy from this speculative dead-end.

3. The Jacobian Orthodoxy

Jacobi's basic argument in the *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen* is as simple as it was effective: Spinoza's philosophy stands as the model for speculative thought; within the limits of *philosophy*, no criticism can be levelled against it: "Within its boundaries, i.e. within the *concept of nature*, [Spinozism] is invincible" (1994 587). Nevertheless, Jacobi continues, the consequences of this system are devastating for all human religion, morality and well-being, for the *Ethics* ends in atheism and fatalism. That is, "when properly understood, Spinoza's doctrines do not admit any kind of religion... [Hence] Spinozism is atheism", and "every avenue of demonstration [as epitomised in Spinozism] ends up in fatalism." (233-4) Thus, philosophical reason – whenever it is employed consistently – must necessarily result in the atheism and fatalism Spinozism exemplifies. Philosophical reason leads to the denial of God and freedom. The only alternative, Jacobi claims, the only means of saving religion and morality, is to give up on philosophy and turn instead to faith. He concludes "that the actual existence of a temporal world made up of individual, finite things... can *in no way* be conceptualised" (373); it is, instead, to be *believed in* through pre-cognitive

faith, “a certainty that *lacks* sufficient reason” (214) or “non-knowledge” (501). The closing words of the *Briefe* read, “The way to knowledge is therefore a *mysterious* one – not the way of syllogism – and much less the way of mechanism.” (249)⁸

Justifications for the above overarching polemic abound in the *Briefe*; for our purposes, the relevant critique concerns the problem of individuation. Jacobi denies that philosophy can provide intrinsic grounds for individuals; in consequence, an absolute individual (and so an absolute person or God) is rendered impossible from a philosophical perspective. As di Giovanni puts it, “The whole point of bringing up the issue of Lessing’s Spinozism was to argue that neither Spinozism, nor, for that matter, any metaphysical system was in a position to express the possibility of true individuation and hence true personality.” (1994 72) Or, as Jacobi himself succinctly puts it, “We are not able to have an idea of a being consisting in itself (that is, an individual).” (Jacobi 1994 242) So, on this count as on many others, philosophy seemingly ends in atheism.

The question of individuation in Spinoza’s philosophy itself is a perplexing one that lies beyond the scope of this paper. Spinoza is a substance-monist, and therefore prohibited from drawing substantial distinctions between individual entities; for this reason the problem is particularly pressing. While from a contemporary perspective its solution most probably revolves around the lemmas of Part II of the *Ethics* and the physics of complexity Spinoza develops there⁹, this does not seem to have been the case for readers of Spinoza in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They – and this list includes not only Jacobi, but Herder, Schelling and Hegel too – remained uninterested in Spinoza’s physics in this context, and instead

⁸ Later, Jacobi was to speak of himself as he “who in the *Letters concerning Spinoza* took his start from the *wonder* of perception and the unfathomable *mystery* of freedom... to display his unphilosophical obstinacy recklessly in the eyes of the world.” (519)

⁹ See Rice 1971, Garrett 1994 and Zourabichvili 2002 13-92.

sought a purely metaphysical solution to the problem of individuation. More specifically, there emerged out of Jacobi's *Briefe* a tradition of metaphysically accounting for Spinozan individuation by means of the principle, *omnis determinatio est negatio*, which Spinoza employs in a 1674 letter to Jelles (*Letter 50*).

Spinoza's *Letter 50* consists for the most part in a discussion of the impropriety of calling God "one or single" (1995 259). This is because one can attribute number to an entity only if it belongs to a set which could potentially include other members. Spinoza writes, "We do not conceive things under the category of numbers unless they are included in a common class." (259) However, God does not meet this condition; it cannot therefore be ascribed the property of being one: "He who calls God one or single has no true idea of God, or is speaking of him very improperly." (260) This is, of course, implicitly relevant to the idea that God cannot be philosophically conceived as an individual, but in the next paragraph of the letter Spinoza goes on to make this explicit. Here, he reaffirms a statement obviously questioned by Jelles, "Figure is a negation and not anything positive." (260) In other words, form is produced through an operation of negation, not affirmation. Spinoza continues, "apprehend[ing] a determinate thing" has nothing to do with the positive characteristics or qualities of that thing, rather it pertains to its "non-being" (260). He then concludes with the key principle, "Figure is nothing but determination, and determination is negation." (260) Moreover, Spinoza explicitly applies this rule to what is infinite (in this case, the infinite mediate mode of extension): "It is obvious that matter in its totality, considered without limitation, can have no figure." (260) Insofar as it is unbounded, what is infinite cannot be considered an individual.

Omnis determinatio est negatio forms the core of Jacobi's demonstration of the impossibility of philosophically accounting for an absolute individual. He writes,

“As far as the one infinite Substance of Spinoza is concerned, it has no determinate or complete existence on its own outside the individual things”, continuing in a note, “An absolute individual is just as impossible as an individual Absolute. *Determinatio est negatio*.” (1994 190) As a result, *Letter 50* is promoted from a peripheral text to a major document of Spinozism, one revelatory of the structure of philosophy in general. What determines individuals for Spinoza and thus for all consistent philosophers is not an intrinsic property of an entity, but what it is not, its “non-being” as Spinoza put it. Specifically, an individual is determined by its difference from other individuals: “All things mutually presuppose one another and refer to one another, so that none of them can either be or be thought of without the rest, or the rest without it.” (227) Jacobi continues later in the *Briefe*, “Each and every living being presupposes all other individual things, and its nature and composition is thoroughly determined through its connection with all the rest.” (369)¹⁰ The philosopher’s universe, according to Jacobi, is a system of negations: what is determinate cannot be defined *positively* as it is in itself, but only *negatively* in terms of the fact it is not anything else. Philosophical reason is therefore incapable of grasping the intrinsic ground of an individual. It can theorise relations, but never persons:

The possibility of the existence of all things known to us is supported by, and refers to, the coexistence of other individual things. We are not in a position to form the representation of a being that subsists completely on its own.
(341)

This is most problematic when it comes to God: absolute or unique individuals become inconceivable on this view. If individuals are constituted by being

¹⁰ This is Jacobi’s summary of *Ethics* IP28.

differentiated from and so determined by other individuals, then they are necessarily finite.¹¹ God, then, cannot be an individual, nor a person: “Insofar as God is infinite, therefore, there cannot be in him the concept of any actually, present, individual, thoroughly determinate thing” (226). In other words, a philosophical account of absolute personality absolved from any limiting relations with others is impossible, according to Jacobi – and this reveals the atheism of Spinozism and all philosophy.

* *

Jacobi’s characterisation of metaphysical accounts of individuation quickly became normative within German philosophy. He inaugurates a tradition that places Spinoza’s *Letter 50* and the claim therein that *omnis determinatio est negatio* at the heart of philosophy’s self-understanding. For example, Herder accepts Jacobi’s contention that God cannot be philosophically conceived as an individual; he merely contests the criticisms that Jacobi draws directly from it. To refuse to think God as an individual is a philosophical virtue, according to Herder, for it would be presumptuous to try to characterise God at all: “The notion of limited personality is applied... inappropriately to that infinite being, for in our world ‘person’ is constituted only through limitation, as a kind of *modus*.” (1993 123) Fichte also stands close to this tradition in his insistence on the necessity of antithesis in the process of determination: “Nothing is known regarding what something is without the thought of what it is not.”¹² To be something determinate it is necessary *not to be* other things: *omnis determinatio est negatio*.

¹¹ Following Spinoza’s definition of finitude in *Ethics* ID2.

¹² Quoted in Frank 2004 87.

It is Hegel, however, who is Jacobi's greatest disciple in this respect. Long after Schelling's response to Jacobi in the *Identitätssystem*, it is Hegel who time and time again promulgates the Jacobian orthodoxy that philosophical accounts of individuation are premised on the principle, *omnis determinatio est negatio*. In the *Logik*, for example, Hegel describes this principle as a "dictum [of] infinite importance" (1958 4:127) and in the *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, he twice calls it a "great dictum" (17:310; 18:374). Hegel also follows Jacobi in promoting *Letter 50* to a central document of Spinozism: *omnis determinatio est negatio* thereby becomes "the absolute principle of Spinozist philosophy." (4:672)

Moreover, in an act of even greater fidelity to Jacobi, Hegel not only claims that this principle is the centrepiece of all philosophical accounts of individuation, but also he further claims that this principle (at least as it has previously been understood) cannot genuinely account for individuality, and certainly not for absolute individuality. That is, while Hegel vehemently attacks the "thoughtless" view that determination could be affirmative (8:218), he is equally insistent that *omnis determinatio est negatio* is problematic in accounting for individuals (even if he ultimately subscribes to this principle). On this principle, all individuals become abstract negations of a prior totality (Spinozan substance): this is not a two-way street where totality and individuals mutually constitute one another, but a one-way derivation of individuals from totality (4:127-8; 18:374-6). Such individuals, Hegel asserts, can only ever be epiphenomena in an acosmist worldview equivalent to atheism (8:148). Like Jacobi, Hegel links these problems to the fact that "substance lacks the principle of *personality*" in Spinoza's philosophy. (4:672-3)¹³

¹³ See also Hegel 1958 18:375 where he explicitly endorses Jacobi's *Briefe* on this point.

Of course, the above is only true, Hegel contends, insofar as the principle is inadequately understood (i.e. understood reflectively); on the other hand, the principle *can* properly account for individuation once understood as a speculative proposition – as Hegel himself is the first to do.¹⁴ Only when negation is not comprehended as a “formless abstraction” (4:127), only when it is understood not as Spinoza understood it but as Hegel does, does the principle *omnis determinatio est negatio* in fact form the basis of a *successful* philosophical account of individuation (4:672-3). Furthermore, so understood in this sublated form, it in fact becomes the only principle that can *refute* Jacobi’s critique of philosophical individuation. However, notwithstanding these differences from Jacobi, even here Hegel still places the operation of negation at the heart of a theory of individuation, and to that extent does still buy into a form of the Jacobian tradition.

4. Affirming Individuals

Jacobi contends therefore that philosophy’s implicit but necessary reliance on the Spinozan dictum, *omnis determinatio est negatio*, means that it cannot furnish a ground for an individual which is also intrinsic to that individual itself. This becomes problematic in relation to an absolute individual. Schelling’s position in the *Erster Entwurf* is consonant with this view: he attempts to account for individual natural products as *negations* (i.e. retardations or limitations) of unconditioned natural force, and fails. In particular, he posits the ideal of an absolute individual that would entirely express infinite productivity, but the limits of his explanatory paradigm – especially his understanding of determination as negation – prevent him from making sense of

¹⁴ On Hegel’s positive understanding of the principle and its differences from Jacobi and Spinoza’s understanding, see the detailed discussion in Stern 2014, as well as Moore 2012 181-2.

such an ideal. In the second half of this essay, I want to argue that in his *Identitätssystem* Schelling responds to Jacobi's challenge (as well as his own implicit acceptance of it in 1799) by rejecting the Spinozan presumption on which it is based. He rejects the idea that determination is a mode of negation, considering it instead a form of affirmation. In this way, Schelling believes he has found a way to provide an intrinsic ground for individuality free from all external comparison.¹⁵

Schelling's opposition to the Jacobian tradition is most evident in his 1806 address, *Über das Verhältnis der bildenden Künste zu der Natur*, where he definitively states, "Definiteness of form is never a negation but always an affirmation" (1856 7:303; 1953 334), in direct opposition to Spinoza's claim in *Letter 50* that "figure is a negation and not anything positive". He continues, the process of determination active in the genesis of individuals should be articulated as "a positive force, which rather runs counter to the existence of things outside one another." (301; 330) This is Schelling's explicit rebuttal of the Jacobian orthodoxy on individuation in general and his own struggles with the problematic in the *Erster Entwurf* in particular. Individuality cannot be understood on a model of negation, and so *omnis determinatio est negatio* is a false turn for philosophy. Only on the basis of the category of *affirmation* will the concept of an individual make philosophical sense, *pace* Jacobi. According to the *Identitätssystem*, philosophy need not conceive individuation extrinsically, as a product of difference. Other alternatives are possible – and this is what the *Identitätssystem* provides. Philosophy is not fated to forever repeat *Letter 50*.

5. Individuation in the *Darstellung*

¹⁵ That Schelling rejects *omnis determinatio est negatio* after 1801 is rarely recognised in the literature; indeed, Beiser (2002 568-9), Bowie (1993 63, 71) and Frank (1985 124) all insist on the opposite.

The *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* of May 1801 is the first product of that “light” that dawned on Schelling at the time; however, from the point of view of his metaphysics of individuation, it is very much a transitional work.¹⁶ While it develops a critique of the attempt to describe individual beings in terms of negation, the text explicitly fails to provide any positive philosophical account of individual beings at all, and even celebrates this fact. The *Darstellung* revels in its acosmism. Only with the subsequent elaborations of the *Identitätssystem* during 1802 and 1803 does a more positive account of individuation as affirmation emerge.¹⁷ In this section, I focus on two elements in the *Darstellung* that anticipate, in a limited fashion, this later account: Schelling’s logic of non-being and his first statement of the doctrine of quantitative differentiation.

* *

Schelling’s *Identitätssystem* opens with a commitment to monism: “Absolute identity is the unique thing that absolutely *is* or is *in itself*” (1856 4:119; 2001a 352), as well as the twin metaphilosophical assertions that “the standpoint of philosophy is the standpoint of reason... a knowing of things as they are in themselves” (115; 349) and that “outside reason is nothing, and in it is everything” (115; 350). Hence, all that is (identity) obeys the logic of identity and all that is not (i.e. nothingness) obeys the logic of non-identity, and philosophy – the construction of things as they are in themselves – operates according to the former logic alone.

¹⁶ Many of the arguments put forward in the next two sections are developed in more detail in Whistler 2013.

¹⁷ As Vater puts it, “The problem of providing an adequate account of individuation furnished Schelling the chief impetus for altering and developing identity-philosophy in the years 1802-6.” (1984 40)

Furthermore, if everything is one, there are no distinct individuals, at least from a philosophical perspective (or, what is the same thing, within the domain of being). Schelling makes this point, first with respect to finitude,

Nothing considered in itself is finite... [That is,] it follows that from the standpoint of reason there is no finitude, and that considering things as finite is precisely the same as not considering them as they are in themselves. (119; 352)

Then, explicitly with respect to individuality in §28 of the *Darstellung*, “There is no individual being or individual thing in itself.” (125; 357) To this extent, then, Schelling modifies Jacobian scepticism of philosophy’s capacity to account for individuation: philosophy fails to individuate, because there *are* no individuals. In so doing, Schelling makes explicit the problem of individuation haunting the *Erster Entwurf*, where to consider reality from the perspective of the unconditioned (i.e. philosophically) was to transform individuals into merely “apparent products” of nature, for nature “is not really concerned with the individual – it is rather occupied with the annihilation of the individual.”

Nevertheless, the above also helps distance Schelling decisively from the Jacobian tradition. For, while from a philosophical perspective individuation is impossible, the Jacobian account of individuation as negation is still deployed to explain the metaphysics of non-being. In other words, *omnis determinatio est negatio* becomes the *non*-philosophical mode of explanation *par excellence*. The phenomenon of individuality belongs now to the domain of non-being and nothingness, i.e. that

which is non-rational and non-philosophical.¹⁸ And it is within this domain – and it alone – that the principle, *omnis determinatio est negatio*, holds. Here an individual is accounted for by not being another individual, so §35 and §36 read, “Nothing individual has the ground of its existence in itself... Each individual being is determined through another individual being... which is again determined through another, and so on without end.” (130-1; 360) As for Jacobi and Spinoza, individual non-beings form a system of difference, in which each is determined in terms of negation. As such, *omnis determinatio est negatio* is no longer the defining principle of *philosophical* accounts of individuation, nor does it have anything to do with the domain of *being* whatsoever; it is relegated to non-existence and the non-philosophical. This leaves open the possibility of alternative accounts of the individuation of beings, and while such a possibility is not pursued within the *Darstellung* itself, an alternative account of determination as affirmation does indeed begin to emerge in the subsequent works of the *Identitätssystem*.

* *

A further shift towards a more successful account of individuation as affirmation is present in the *Darstellung* as well, and it is to be found in the doctrine of quantitative differentiation that Schelling first presents there. This doctrine is articulated in the text as a way of accounting for the genesis of individuated non-being out of the pure identity of being. What is central for our purposes is that Schelling turns to the category of quantity in order to avoid that of negation.¹⁹ Identity is that which admits

¹⁸ Schelling articulates it thus, “Difference can be posited only in the context of what is sundered from the absolute, and only to the degree that it is sundered. This is the individual.” (127; 358)

¹⁹ What complicates Schelling’s rejection of the Spinozan heritage of *omnis determinatio est negatio* is precisely this alternative recourse to quantity, for the latter is, of course, itself a revival of early modern

of no negation: $A=A$ is precisely not $A\neq A$; therefore any account in the *Identitätssystem* of how identity comes to appear as difference needs to avoid any recourse to negativity.

Identity comprises all that there is, and therefore the only thing that can distinguish one entity from another is the degree with which such identity is posited in different cases. This notion of determination through degree is stressed by Schelling throughout the *Identitätssystem* in his talk of “degrees of the absolute” (1856 2:64; 1988 48), “different grades of identity” (1856 4:431) or of individuality arising out of “a partial positing of infinite reality” (387). It is also what Grant means when he speaks of “the quantity of identity” each entity possesses for Schelling (2006 174) or of the fact that “there can be no differences in kind, but only in degree.” (147) On this basis, §23 of the *Darstellung* reads, “None other than quantitative difference is at all possible between subject and predicate.” (1856 4:123; 2001a 355) Such a thesis has two corollaries. First, “Any qualitative difference between the two is unthinkable”, because “it is the same equal absolute identity that is posited as subject and object.” (123; 355) That is, qualitative difference is impossible, because subject and predicate are the same thing: $A=A$ is universal and no qualitative distinction holds between “A” and “A”.²⁰ Second, Schelling continues,

metaphysics, specifically its reduction of qualities to quantity. In this regard, Schelling implicitly positions himself in the *Identitätssystem* as the last of the early modern philosophers.

²⁰ Schelling has earlier discussed why this is the case: “*In itself*,” he writes, “A has being just as much as B, because A, like B, is the whole of absolute identity”; that is, A and B are identical: “Nothing can be posited under the form A that is not as such and *eo ipso* also posited under the form B, and nothing can be posited under B that would not immediately also be posited under A.” Thus, “this opposition [between A and B] has utterly no standing in itself or from the viewpoint of speculation.” (135-6; 364) $A=B$ is thus a form of $A=A$. In the 1804 *System*, Schelling states, “In reason, we shall never *know* any relation other than the one inherent in this identity, and the strict task of our further construction will be to *present identity eternally as identity* and to recognise nothing as real that would induce us to consider this identity to be cancelled or negated.” (1856 6:156; 1994a 153)

Since there is no possible difference between the two in terms of being itself (because they are equally unconditioned as subject and object, thus the same in essence), there remains only a quantitative difference, i.e. one that obtains with respect to the *amount* of being, such that the same identity is posited, but with a predominance of subjectivity or objectivity. (123; 355)

What is crucial in individuating entities is the “amount of being” (or, in Grant’s paraphrase, “quantity of identity”). Individuals are not to be thought of as distinct subjects and objects but as various grades of the production of the absolute. Difference is quantitative.

One of the most fundamental implications of the above doctrine is its rejection of negation. “We never emerge from $A=A$ ” (1856 4:137; 2001a 365) is the guiding thread of the *Identitätssystem*.²¹ Or, in Schelling’s own words, “Absolute identity can never be abolished as absolute identity” (119; 352) – that is, it can never be negated. There is nothing which is not part of the absolute positing of the absolute: “The same identity is posited throughout.” (137; 365) Individuals are not generated through a process of negation, i.e. *omnis determinatio est negatio* is firmly rejected. So, Schelling writes in a later work, identity “cannot be negated anywhere and in no manner” (SW 6:179; 1994a 169), continuing elsewhere, “Reason posits neither the negation of opposites nor even any opposites... Negation is not posited.” (SW 7:154; 1984b 253-4)²²

6. Infinite Finitude

²¹ This statement is found in a footnote added by the editor of the *Werke*. It continues, “All difference consists just in this: $A=A$ is posited in one direction or tendency.”

²² The aphorism continues, “Not the negation, therefore, for then the unity would be a merely negating and therefore conditioned unity.”

During the *Identitätssystem*, the absolute always and necessarily exists as formed or determined; for example, Schelling claims,

The proposition $A=A$ expresses a being, that of absolute identity; this being, however, is inseparable from its form. So there is here a unity of being and form, and this unity is the supreme existence. (1856 4:126; 2001a 357)

Reality is always already determinate, and so nothing indeterminate exceeds it. There is no ineffable “behind” or “beyond” individuals. In other words, the *Identitätssystem* breaks with the synecdochical metaphysics that informed the *Erster Entwurf*. In the 1799 work, unconditional productivity both is and is not its products: it exceeds them. In the *Identitätssystem*, such a worldview is rejected in the name of absolute immanence: the unconditioned is now nothing more than its products and *entirely* exhausted by them. Schelling’s 1799 statement that productivity “does not exhibit itself entirely in any finite product” is false by 1801.

The point can be illustrated by means of a disagreement between Schelling and Fichte. After reading the 1801 *Darstellung*, Fichte countered: the absolute as absolute cannot be formed, for such formation would diminish its absoluteness. He therefore warns Schelling, “The absolute would not be absolute if it existed in any specific form.” (Schelling 1962 2:381; Fichte and Schelling 1997 89) Fichte argues that to form the absolute would be to lose something, that formation is always necessarily a process of alienation, but this is precisely what Schelling rejects. Formation is not a distortion, but in fact a production. Schelling thus writes in a later work, implicitly responding to Fichte’s comment, “The true [absolute] is not formlessness, but is delimited in itself, is finished *by* itself and is thus perfect.” (1856 7:143; 1984b 246)

Schellingian philosophy after 1801 therefore conceives form as always *excessive* or, better still, affirmative. Formation is never a diminution, loss or distortion; it is never a negation. What should be clear is the anti-Jacobian tenor of this account. At its basis stands affirmation and intensification, not negation. Differentiation is a result of reiterated affirmation or production. Usler puts it as follows, “The inner movement of Schellingian absolute identity is fundamentally different from Hegel’s dialectical movement... And the fundamental difference is that Schelling conceives the inner movement of the absolute *without negation*.” (1968 503) He continues, the basis of Schellingian thought “is not a negation of the negation, but the finite potentiation of an identity of identity.” (507)

* *

Formation thus forms part of the activity of self-affirmation in which the absolute consists: the absolute affirms itself and, in so doing, reality is constituted. Identity is affirmed and thus formed. And, in the works written after the *Darstellung*, Schelling goes on to claim that it is as part of this process of affirmative formation that individuation occurs. That is, individuality is no longer expelled from the domain of being, but is now incorporated into it, and it is Schelling’s doctrine of ideas developed during 1802 and 1803 that exemplifies this new position.

Identity affirms itself and thereby “refracts” (1856 6:441; 7:172) into individual expressions of identity, and this is how plurality arises in the Schellingian cosmos. In Tilliette’s words, “Identity unfolds into an efflorescence of forms, a streaming forth and profusion.” (1999 147) Reality is not merely formed as $A=A$, but also $B=B$ or $Z=Z$ etc, a multiplicity of expressions of identity are engendered when

reality constitutes itself. Schelling designates these various manifestations of identity “ideas”.²³ Ideas designate the individuals that constitute reality; they are the absolute as it is variously and repeatedly formed. They are therefore what compose reality when it is properly viewed. During 1802 and 1803, Schelling is committed to the view that everything individual that exists (when reality is viewed adequately) is an idea: “Every particular object is in its absolute status idea.” (1856 4:405; 2001b 392) All ideas are absolute manifestations of identity in idiosyncratic – but parallel – forms.

Schelling here discovers the very conception of an absolute individual for which he had been searching in the *Erster Entwurf*. It is no longer an impossible ideal, but the natural outcome of his new conception of differentiation. Ideas are absolute individuals – “the absolute in the particular” (1856 4:405; 2001b 392)²⁴ – and so solve what for the Schelling of the *Erster Entwurf* was “the highest problem of all systematic science” (1856 3:14; 2004 15): the indwelling of the infinite in the finite. That is, an idea constitutes a finite form in which the infinite is expressed entirely (as its intrinsic ground) – or, as Schelling puts it in *Bruno*, it is “infinite finitude” (1856 4:248; 1984a 48). Here, “The infinite in and for itself and the finite in and for itself... are really only one.” (1856 4:385) This notion of the complete informing (*einbilden*) of the infinite into the finite goes on to become central to Schelling’s thinking from 1802 onwards. In the *Philosophie der Kunst*, for example, he writes, “The mystery of all life is the synthesis of the absolute with limitation”, continuing, “The universe forms and moulds itself. . . [Its] consistent and pervading law is absoluteness in limitation.” (1856 5:393; 1989 37) This is elsewhere labelled “the essence of all art”

²³ See 1856 6:191; 1994a 177.

²⁴ The full quotation from the *Fernere Darstellungen* sheds more light on this property of the ideas: they “furnish the unique possibility of comprehending absolute profusion within absolute unity, the particular in the universal, and precisely by that also the absolute in the particular – blessed beings, as some designate the first creatures who live in the immediate sight of God, which we shall more accurately say, are gods themselves, since each is for itself absolute, and yet each is included in the absolute form.”

(639; 207) or “the law of beauty” (Robinson 1976 160). To return to an earlier argument, this doctrine of absoluteness in limitation is a result of Schelling’s insistence that formation generates absoluteness, rather than diminishes it. Here we uncover Schelling’s mature conception of an absolute individual, or absoluteness in limitation: it is made possible by a reconception of individuation in terms of intense affirmation, rather than negation. And it is here that Schelling’s break with the Jacobian tradition of *omnis determinatio est negatio* is strongest, resulting in the defining thesis, “Definiteness of form is never a negation but always an affirmation.”

8. From Process to Principle

In the *Erster Entwurf*, the process of individuation poses a problem. It is a problem partly because Schelling still remains in thrall, implicitly at least, to a Jacobian conception in which the individual can only be philosophically accounted for by a negation – in this case, of unconditioned productivity – and thus an absolute individual (that which equally affirms the unconditioned and the conditioned) is rendered inconceivable. With the *Identitätssystem*, Schelling finally manages to liberate himself from this tradition to conceive of an affirmative form of individuality by means of the category of infinite finitude.

Two tendencies can be traced in Schelling’s transition from *Naturphilosophie* to *Identitätssystem* here. First, as I argued in the Introduction, the *Identitätssystem* marks a reversion to the explicit concerns and vocabularies of metaphysics, and it is seemingly precisely this reinsertion of the problem of individuation back into a metaphysical discourse that enables Schelling to more directly challenge the Jacobian orthodoxy and develop an alternative to it. Moreover, secondly, this is because the

Jacobian tradition and Schelling's *Identitätssystem* oppose each other at the level of a principle of individuation: whereas Jacobi and Hegel assert, *omnis determinatio est negatio*, Schelling counters, *omnis determinatio est affirmatio*. In 1799, however, the formulation of a principle of individuation was in no way Schelling's main concern; rather, he had been interested in "attain[ing] knowledge of the individual *in process*" (Toscano 2006 9), and so mapping "the material... operations that lead to the constitution of individuations without having recourse to *principles of individuation*" (3).

The above draws on the theoretical frame to Alberto Toscano's *The Theatre of Production* which itself traces "the modern emergence of what we will hazard to call the *genetic modality of individuation*" (1) from Kant's third *Critique* to Deleuze by way of *Naturphilosophie*.²⁵ For Toscano, this represents first and foremost a "shift... between an ontology of *individuality* and an ontology of *individuation*" (1) – that is, an increasing marginalisation of any attempt to articulate one basic principle of individuality in favour of a description of the various material "conditions of realisation" of individuals (15). What occurs in Schelling's transition from *Naturphilosophie* to *Identitätssystem* is, however, an *exact reversal* of this trend: he reverts to principles at the expense of his earlier interest in material conditions. Moreover, this is not (at least entirely) a failure or mistake on Schelling's part: something significant is *gained* by this return to principles from processes of individuation. That is, it enables Schelling to re-enter into the metaphysical debates that informed the implicit background to his *Naturphilosophie*, and explicitly remould and reconstitute his metaphysical presuppositions. The transition to the *Identitätssystem* opens up a discursive space for Schelling to take on the Jacobian

²⁵ Toscano himself is, however, decidedly ambivalent to Schelling's brand of *Naturphilosophie* (xi).

tradition of individuation and formulate a radical alternative. This is one reason why Schelling's trajectory from January to May 1801 need not be considered a wrong turning.

Bibliography

- Beiser, Frederick C. 2002. *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bowie, Andrew. 1993. *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Di Giovanni, George. 1994. "Translator's Introduction" to F.H. Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, edited and translated by di Giovanni. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press. 3-167.
- Fichte, J.G. and F.W.J. Schelling. 1997. "Selections from the Fichte-Schelling Correspondence," in Schulte-Sasse *et al* (eds), *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 73-90.
- Frank, Manfred. 1985. *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Frank, Manfred. 2004. *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*. Translated by Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Garrett, Don. 1994. "Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation," in Jorge Gracia and Kenneth Barber (eds), *Individuation and Identity in Early Modern Philosophy*. Albany: SUNY Press. 73-101.

- Grant, Iain Hamilton. 2006. *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling*. London: Continuum.
- Hegel, G.W.F. 1958. *Werke*. 20 vols. Edited by Hermann Glockner. Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog.
- Herder, J.G. 1993. *Against Pure Reason: Writings on Religion, Language and History*. Edited and translated by Marcia Bunge. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Jacobi, F.H. 1994. *The Main Philosophical Writings*. Edited and translated by George di Giovanni. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Lukács, George. 1980. *The Destruction of Reason*. Translated by Peter Palmer. London: Merlin.
- Moore, A.W. 2012. *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nassar, Dalia. 2011. "Schelling und die Frühromantik: Das Unendliche und das Endliche im Kunstwerk," in Mildred Galland-Szymkowiak (ed), *Das Problem der Endlichkeit in der Philosophie Schellings*. Berlin: Lit-Verlag, 2011. 58-71.
- Rice, Lee. 1971. "Individuation in Spinoza." *The Monist* 55: 640-59.
- Robinson, Henry Crabb. 1976. "Schellings Aesthetik," in Ernst Behler, "Schellings Ästhetik in der Überlieferung von Henry Crabb Robinson." *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 83.1: 153-185.
- Schelling, F.W.J. 1856. *Werke*. 14 volumes. Edited by K.F.A. Schelling. Stuttgart: Cotta.
- Schelling, F.W.J. 1962. *Briefe und Dokumente*. 3 volumes. Edited by Horst Fuhrmans. Bonn: Bouvier.

- Schelling, F.W.J. 1953. *Concerning the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature*.
Translated by Michael Bullock. Appendix to Herbert Read, *The True Voice of Feeling: Studies in English Romantic Poetry*. London: Faber. 323-64.
- Schelling, F.W.J. 1984a. *Bruno, or On the Divine Principle of Things*. Edited and translated by Michael G. Vater. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Schelling, F.W.J. 1984b. *Aphorisms as an Introduction to Naturphilosophie*.
Translated by Fritz Marti. *Idealistic Studies* 14.3: 244-58.
- Schelling, F.W.J. 1988. *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*. Translated by Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schelling, F.W.J. 1989. *Philosophy of Art*. Translated by Douglas W. Stott. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.
- Schelling, F.W.J. 1994a. *System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular*, in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays*, edited and translated by Thomas Pfau. Albany: SUNY Press. 139-94.
- Schelling, F.W.J. 1994b. *On the History of Modern Philosophy*. Translated by Andrew Bowie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schelling, F.W.J. 2001a. *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*. Translated by Michael G. Vater. *Philosophical Forum* 32.4: 339-71.
- Schelling, F.W.J. 2001b. *Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy*.
Translated by Michael G. Vater. *Philosophical Forum* 32.4: 373-97.
- Schelling, F.W.J. 2004. *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*.
Translated by Keith R. Peterson. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Spinoza, Benedict de. 1995. *The Letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett.

- Stern, Robert. 2014. “‘Determination is Negation’: The Adventures of a Doctrine from Spinoza to Hegel to the British Idealists.” Forthcoming.
- Tilliette, Xavier. 1999. *Schelling: Biographie*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy.
- Toscano, Alberto. 2004. “Philosophy and the Experience of Construction,” in Jane Norman and Alistair Welchman (eds), *The New Schelling*. London: Continuum. 106-27.
- Toscano, Alberto. 2006. *The Theatre of Production: Philosophy and Individuation between Kant and Deleuze*. Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan.
- Uslar, Detlev von. 1968. “Die innere Bewegung der absoluten Identität bei Schelling.” *Studium Generale* 21: 503-14.
- Vater, Michael G. 1984. “Translator’s Introduction” to F.W.J. Schelling, *Bruno, or On the Divine Principle of Things*, edited and translated by Vater. Albany: SUNY Press. 3-107.
- Whistler, Daniel. 2013. *Schelling’s Theory of Symbolic Language: Forming the System of Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- White, Alan. 1983. *Schelling: An Introduction to the System of Freedom*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Zourabichvili, François. 2002. *Spinoza: Une physique de la pensée*. Paris: PUF.